

## [A Young Italian Granite Cutter]

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### A YOUNG ITALIAN GRANITE CUTTER

He was one of the wildly enthusiastic crowd that filled the bleachers on the baseball field. His bronzed face towered a good head above his companions. In spotless summer linen and immaculate white shoes it was hard to visualize him as a week day granite worker, head, face and clothing in a film of dust. Through the brown of his sun goggles his eyes crinkled good naturedly. "If there's anything I hate it's glasses." He grinned. "I had a horror of 'em in school. My sister had to wear 'em after a siege of measles. I certainly pitied her. When my father and mother hinted that I'd better have my eyes examined, too (I'd had the measles along with my sister), I put up such a howl they finally let me have my own way. I still hate sun goggles. I do mind the goggles we wear in the shed. I wouldn't wear 'em if it wasn't for my father. He's part owner of the shed. He's come around and lectured me plenty of times for not wearing 'em. It's humiliating. He doesn't care what he says, and he doesn't care who's around to hear it. I've been sticking to them pretty regularly of late.

"It's a great day for a game, isn't it? It's about the only attraction that draws such a Barre crowd to Montpelier. Yes, I'm playing softball again this year. But we haven't been doing much. Last year we played twice a week. Some of those sweltering days I was tired out before C. 3 [??] 2 even starting the game.

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"When I was in High School I never dreamed that I'd work in my father's shed. The family was dead set against it. Guess I just drifted into it. The summer after I graduated I helped some in the shed office. When fall came I stayed on. Around Christmas time they were short a man for odd work, so I left the office and I've been cutting stone ever since. About ten years. Two or three times I've almost quit. Three years ago was the last time I had the urge. I promised myself then that I'd work five years more and save as much as I could. A farm, that's what I want. Country where there's green, and quiet and fresh air. I manage to save quite a bit of money; I live with my people and I'm not married. I've two years to go then I'll quit the sheds.

"I have a hunch that my father will sell his shed before long. I've been trying to talk him into it. He doesn't make the money there that he used to. He's interested in my plans for a farm. I wouldn't be surprised if he followed my example.

"He's always said that when he sells he's going to take a trip to Italy. He and my mother. They've never been back. No, they wouldn't make their home there. They like America too well for that. My father has property over there, a house - the house he was born in - and a good stretch of farming land. It was left to him by my grandfather; my father's sister has been living there. 3 When father goes over he's going to give her the property. He says she deserves it. She's worked the fields and kept up the repairs on the house. Yes, she and my father keep in touch with each other. She wrote last month. The letter upset my father. She said her son, he's a year younger than I, was sent to Albania. In service. She doesn't speak well of Mussolini. Says he's too domineering and grasping. The letter was pitiful. Their little village was drowned in grief. From almost every family there was at least one man preparing to leave for Albania. They live in a small village near Mantua. Lombards, they are, and they speak the Lombardy dialect.

"No, I've never heard my father speak of granite sheds or quarries in their village. I know that he learned the trade in Como. My mother was from the same village. They were

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married over here. In Barre. My father sent for her after he'd been here about four years. From what I hear, many Italians followed that example.

"Wed got a semi-monthly paper from Italy. No, I can't read it. I can pick out a few words, but that's all. The only Italian I speak is the Lombardy dialect. My folks were taught the pure Italian in school, but they hardly ever speak it. They read every bit of that newspaper, and then pass it on to some neighbors of ours. It's interesting to listen to them.

"When a half dozen of them gather over drinks the talk invariably drifts to Italy. Before the session's over they've 4 talked Italian politics until they're blue in the face. They've praised Mussolini for his constructive principles, and damned him for his arrogance.

"We've a fellow in the shed, an Italian well over 60, - Italian politics and Mussolini are meat and drink to him. I've overheard him dozens of times in conversation with fellow Italians speak of Mussolini as devil, pig, dog. But let him talk to me of another nationality and he praises Mussolini to the sky, he's the savior of Italy, the greatest mind in all Europe . We played a joke on him one night in a beer garden. Myself, a couple of older Italians from the shed, and a couple of Irishmen. We were supposed to get him steamed up over Mussolini, and when he was going good to motion to the two Irishmen to make their appearance. It worked fine, at first. Old Luke was drinking pretty hard that night. It didn't take long to get him swearing and cursing over Mussolini. He didn't see the two Irishmen standing behind his chair. They were there for all of five minutes while he damned Mussolini. Finally one of them drawled. "Sa-ay, I thought this Mussolini was a good guy——"

"'Sure,' the other chimed in, 'only yesterday you were telling me he was the best man Italy'd ever had. What's made you change your mind, Luke?'

"Old Luke swung around. His jaw hung in surprise. For a moment he froze like an animal that's suddenly found itself trapped. Then an expression of shame and self-contempt flooded his face. He was so miserable that I couldn't 5 help but feel uncomfortable and guilty. In that one minute I caught an understanding of his feelings: declaring Mussolini's

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misdeeds to a fellow Italian was like discussing a brother's faults with another member of the family, with someone who in the interests of the home would respect the knowledge. But to tell an outsider was betraying your brother and your family; to condemn Mussolini before a non-Italian was to belittle the whole Italian race. Yes, I was feeling sorry for him, and ashamed of myself. But it didn't last long. He turned the tables on us. Old Luke was wise. Wiser than we who'd planned the joke. That shamed expression vanished. He tossed down the rest of his wine and eyed the Irishman shrewdly. 'Listen, you bum', he roared at them in his broken English, 'me, I have been talk' Italian all night. An' since when is it that you two are smart enough to understand' Italian in these thick head of yours! How do you know but maybe it is you two I have been call' damfool all night?'

"But the joke taught old Luke a lesson. He hasn't been as eager to give his opinion on politics."